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Patricia F. Carini: A Dedication

-- by Susan Donnelly

When I first visited the Prospect Center in North Bennington, Vermont in 1984 and met Pat Carini, there were several things that struck me right away about the setting: The children were active and engaged in making things; the Center was a lively community of thinkers involving children and adults in a variety of ways; and I was welcomed as an active participant from the outset. It was a bustling place in which to observe and listen and contemplate. At that point, Prospect was two decades old; it had already matured into an organization with a recognizable philosophy and outlook; it had published descriptions of itself and the collaborative inquiry processes that are a hallmark of its legacy. I spent the next seven years working and studying at Prospect, where I was a fortunate benefactor of the thought and work of many contributors over that early time period, but the primary and consistent influence throughout was Patricia Carini.

One of the things that Pat consciously fostered was intellectual collaboration. By the time I visited Prospect, there was a sense of belonging to a community of thinkers that was embedded in the way that the adults worked together. After school on my first visit, I was invited to attend a seminar with a group of Prospect Fellows. They were using a Prospect Descriptive Process to study a piece of artwork from one child's archive collection. I expected that I would be observing from the side. However, with only the briefest introduction, I was included in the rounds of observation and discussion and my comments were given the same attention as the other participants'. Pat was in this group, but someone else chaired it. I soon learned that the role of chairperson rotated among participants, as did the other roles – further evidence of intentional collaboration – so no one person was considered the expert. Although it was clear that Pat was a keen and experienced observer and that her insights helped to deepen ours, it was also a genuine fact that we benefitted from the mixture of a range of perspectives in the group.

The Prospect Center, which eventually included a small teacher education program and the archive of children's work, started with the opening of an elementary classroom in 1965. Marion Stroud, who brought with her thirteen years of experience in British Infant Schools, was the first teacher. Drawing on the conceptual heritage of John Dewey, Prospect used multi-age groupings and offered the children plenty of choices of materials to work with. The teacher acted as a facilitator of learning more than as an impartor of information.

Initially, Pat filled the role of evaluator for the program, drawing on her previous training in developmental psychology. To meet the accountability requirements of the federal agency that provided part of their funding, she devised story- telling and problem-solving instruments to document the children's conceptual development.

However, the classroom setting offered Pat rich opportunities for observing children engaged in self-chosen projects. These, in turn, focused her attention on expressiveness, gesture, and the apparently innate capacity of children to create things. This started a metamorphosis of thought, which Pat described in a 1979 monograph:

The issues which ... most captured and challenged my thought during this period of re-thinking [were] time and meaning. Educated to view the person through the lens of the developmental construct, I was accustomed to a linear definition of time and to the generalization of personal experience according to developmental stages. The knowledge of developmental stages made available through the classic work of Piaget, Vygotsky, Werner, and others, was both formidable and informing. However, as I watched children, certain limitations of this construct became increasingly apparent. Particularly overlooked by this definition of time, I saw, was the person's own intuition of time, the relationship of personal time to epochal and historical time, and to memory and meaning (both personal and historical). Increasingly, therefore, my thought has focused on the notion of time itself in its multiple dimensions, and on the continuity and transformation of the person through time. (Carini, p. 2, 1979)

Pat was an avid reader and her questions about time, meaning and the nature of persons led her to the writings of a number of philosophers. In the *Art of Seeing* monograph quoted above, Pat lists the sources that acted as midwives during this period of transformation:

These sources, in counterpoint with the activity of observing at the Prospect School, have shaped my thinking and greatly expanded my access to the things I observe. ... *The Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and *Modes of Thought* (Whitehead, 1958) for thought-provoking conceptualizations of the body; *Metamorphosis* (Schactel, 1959) for a creative interpretation of perception; *Saving the Appearances* (Barfield, 1966) and *Man's Place in Nature* (Scheler, 1968) for conceptualizations of man's essential openness to, and detachment from, the world; *What Is Called Thinking* (Heidegger, 1968) for its profound statement of quest and questioning; and *The Nature of Sympathy* (Scheler, 1970) for the basis which it provides for the recognition of the experience of others.... At a more methodological level, the essays by Merleau-Ponty published in *The Primacy of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964), Jung's essay "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle" (Jung, 1969) and Owen Barfield's interpretation of Coleridge's notions of triune thought (Barfield, 1971) have been formative in creating a framework for the study of the person. Finally, Owen Barfield's examination in *Worlds Apart* (Barfield, 1963) of the applications of science in widely divergent fields has provided an integration of my own thoughts on the specialization of knowledge. (p. 2)

Pat's genius was to bring these kinds of large, philosophical ideas into close proximity with real children and, through detailed observation and disciplined description, to make the inner work of the person visible. And by *inner work*, Pat means no less a task than the making of a world.

To resist a constricted educational vision and devaluing of humanness, I offer humanness itself. I offer humanness as widely distributed capacity, as active making, as value, as resource, as scale, as process, and as responsibility. Drawing on my long history as an observer of children, I anchor this view of humanness in children, and in ourselves, as makers: as drawers, story tellers, painters, sculptors, builders, engineers, teachers, writers, care givers, quilters, carpenters, gardeners; in short, as makers and remakers of a human world. (Carini, p. 1, 2001)

During the two decades from when the school opened in 1965 to the completion of the Reference Edition of the Archive of Children's Work in 1986, Pat and many Prospect colleagues were engaged in developing descriptive processes to study children and their works. These processes were being used and further developed in a variety of ways in seminars and grant-funded research projects involving educators from across the country. Many of the studies were longitudinal, following particular children for five, eight, and up to twenty years. What emerged was a rich collection of descriptions of unique individuals, each with their own strengths and perspectives. (Carini P. F., 1982, Bussis, 1985)

In 1982, under the auspices of the NYS Bureau of Child Development and Parent Education, Prospect designed a five-year documentary study of children enrolled in the state's Experimental Pre-Kindergarten Program. This extensive project included classroom observations and studies of children's work from Pre-K programs in a variety of districts. In a report about the project, Pat described what the study unveiled about particular children:

Each [child] has a characteristic way of relating to the world which is the key to personal continuity, and also the key to each child's fundamental and ongoing educability. It is as if certain ideas, things and qualities called to each [child] in a voice that child could hear, or as if those ideas, things, and qualities beckoned and led each child along particular paths. The voices each hears and the paths each follows are true guides to the education of the person, and also provide direction for the most limited goals of schooling or training. To hear the voices the child hears and to follow the pathways alongside the child opens for the teacher and parent a natural and continuing access to the experiences that will nourish and further the child's growth. This hearing and following also suggest ways to make knowledge which is more obscure and difficult at least accessible, and possibly interesting, to the child. (Carini, p. 74, 1982)

This very personal and relationship-based view of children and education is radical, at least in our current system that emphasizes standardization, accountability and scripted, commercially produced curricula. This approach portrays each child as a person with unique strengths and interests, a person of capacity and wonder, a person who is pursuing knowledge and creating meaning. It provides an antidote to the deficit view that is so deeply embedded in our usual and historic ways of thinking about children as *empty vessels* or *incomplete adults* or *developmentally immature*.

For teachers, parents, administrators and others searching for alternatives to these negative views of children, the Prospect Practitioner Fellowship Program at the University of Vermont (UVM) is proving invaluable. The Prospect Fellows who participate in this seminar are awarded a small grant to study and use the Prospect Archive of Student Work now housed at the UVM (Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research, 1986) and are mentored by Ellen Schwartz, a former public school teacher with a long-time Prospect association. In the Conclusion of the latest book in the Prospect series published by Teachers College Press, *Making Space for Active Learning*, Schwartz describes a response from the Fellows as they explore the Archive that surprised her:

What I have discovered through working with the Fellows is that there is a hunger among teachers for something that acknowledges both the intellectual and relational work of teaching. In the first summer of the UVM Fellowships, I had assumed from people's applications that they would be interested in documentation of things like curriculum, formation of group, and teacher interviews. They were, but what took me by surprise was the passion aroused by the more philosophical writings, essays that described a way of thinking about children and learning that resonated with their own deeply held values. (Martin & Schwartz, p. 172, 2014)

Prior to my association with Pat and the Prospect Center, I had been trained in careful observation as an early childhood educator. I was fascinated by the individuality of children and I was fairly adept at discerning a child's interests and connecting with them on a personal level. However, like the Prospect Fellows that Ellen has been working with, I felt a hunger that I couldn't name and I found sustenance in Prospect's deeply humane approach to persons and to education. Reading philosophy with Pat and participating in the Prospect descriptive processes opened up new levels of meaning and understanding about children, their expressiveness, and their creations that have affected all of my work since.

When the Prospect School closed in 1991 due to financial difficulties, I was fortunate, with my husband, David Carroll, who also worked at Prospect, to gain positions at Michigan State University with a group of like-minded folks including Dirck Roosevelt (a former Director of Prospect), Helen and Jay Featherstone, and Sharon Feiman-Nemser. Together, we worked to

develop a high-quality teacher education program in a large and bureaucratic public university over the course of a decade. ... As products of the civil rights era and the 1960s revival of democratic, progressive education, we were committed to the elusive and lofty goal of democracy in education ... (Carroll, Featherstone, Featherstone, Feiman-Nemser, & Roosevelt, p. 5, 2007).

At MSU we were able to use our Prospect experience to shape a child study assignment based on Prospect's Descriptive Review of a Child. This assignment became the centerpiece of the introductory course for our aspiring teachers. Roosevelt taught this course for several years and wrote about the connection between this version of child study and democratic education in *Transforming Teacher Education*:

At base, "democracy" means that each human being has the capacity as well as the right to be a maker of laws, to do more than merely follow—or evade—laws imposed by others. ... The connection between studying children and democracy is made by way of this fundamental meaning of the word capacity. Democracy is a proposition premised on the existence of profound and complex capacity on the part of all humans to rightly and powerfully act to shape worthwhile shared human life. The capacity is not automatically realized nor understood. All of the careful observation of and meditation on students and on the things they say, do, and make—the work of Child Study—is a discipline in perception and in valuation of capacity, in order that it become a central orientation for instruction. What is this person good at now, what kinds of materials and ideas stimulate her energy and effort and care, what questions does she favor, what struggles does she willingly return to, what is the tendency of her interests, what does she contribute to this environment? These questions, the kinds the descriptive processes engage, are asked, first, to build appreciation of the student's capacities as she is making them known to us, and, second, to help us as teachers identify the resources and opportunities that could logically extend those capacities and bring the child into a larger set of relationships and possibilities. (Carroll, Featherstone, Featherstone, Feiman-Nemser, & Roosevelt, pp. 133-134, 2007)

Over the years, Pat's work and that of the Prospect Center have been a North Star for many beleaguered educators as they have steadfastly worked to recognize children's capacities and "make space for active learning" while negotiating external (and sometimes well-meaning but often ill-fated) policies and expectations (Martin & Schwartz, 2014). Prospect's collaborative descriptive processes provide a way for groups of educators to support each other in their ongoing work. For many years there have been teacher study groups meeting regularly in Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Vermont and elsewhere. Stories from these teachers are featured in two books in the Prospect series published by Teachers College Press: *From Another Angle* (Himley, 2000) and *Making Space for Active Learning*. These stories describe

the struggles of many teachers in a variety of school districts as they deal with school closures, staffing cuts, top-down requirements for increased assessments, imposed curriculum changes, and bone-wearying discouragement. Despite all the obstacles, they continue to advocate on behalf of the children in their classrooms, to find, as Chris Powers, a Philadelphia teacher, phrases it, “wobble room” (Martin & Schwartz, pp. 142-44) for them to exercise their capacities and experience their worth to their community. This struggle for a more humane education is a work that, as Pat says, *has no final destination*.

Prospect’s philosophy holds that struggle itself has positive value, is indeed itself a worthy work, and more than that, a work indispensable to the well-being of society. As a work in its own right, struggle, like teaching, can anticipate no final destination, no final solution. There is always more to be done, for there is no conceivable conclusion to the striving for a more just society, more equal distribution of opportunity, for schools that are more (not less) roomy. For those dedicated to the proposition that the world or the society at large can be more humane, there isn’t going to be a time to say with satisfaction, “Well, we solved that problem,” and dusting off our hands, depart from the scene. There isn’t going to be a time when advocacy and struggle can be set aside. (Martin & Schwartz, p. 177, 2014)

Pat is certainly not one to dust off her hands. She continues to reveal and challenge, to speak truth to power, in her talks and writings. In the Introduction to *Making Space for Active Learning*, she indicts the corporate influence on education that has taken hold during the past decade or so:

Aligning education, from early childhood through university, with the corporate dictates of a capitalist economic system systematically reduces the purposes of education to what serves the maintenance of the system. Excluded is the democratic aim of an educated citizenry. Excluded is the nurturing of the dreams and aspirations of each child and of all. When profit becomes a synonym for success, there is neither time nor tolerance for a garden of children at play, for hands-on learning propelled by a spirit of inquiry, for the exploration in breadth and depth of texts, ideas, and questions.

Schools driven by technocratic mandates are left with little opportunity for children to learn what it is to be a member of a community, to work things out together. The very language of democracy – of democratic action, of civil protest, of rights before the law, of societal responsibility to protect the rights of those denied a voice – is gutted. Uniformity becomes the undisguised standard for schools and teaching, with federal and state funding tied to acceptance of that standard. The result? Autocratic, top-down governance of the nation’s schools. (Martin & Schwartz, p. 6, 2014)

With those powerful words ringing in our minds, we dedicate this issue of *The Journal of Educational Controversy* to Pat and to her work in the hopes that it will provide resources and inspiration for those involved in the ongoing struggle for a more humane and just society.

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